

## Shailendra

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**T**he first meeting between myself and Shailendra is still fresh in my memory. The school where I was studying 20 years ago, at Solapur, was housed in a building of which the ground floor was a theatre, the second floor was also a theatre, and there was even a theatre next door. The school, on the first floor, was thus in the midst of theatres. In those days, loudspeakers were placed not only inside but outside the theatres, so that the songs could be heard and enjoyed by all and sundry. The preliminary examinations for matriculation were on, silence reigned supreme in the class and outside, when suddenly around 4 or 4.30 in the afternoon the lilting note of a Western musical instrument rose high and clear and then dropped. My hand, poised on the answer sheet, automatically stopped. Following the note came Mukesh's irrepressible voice, like splashing water:

पतली कमर है, तिरछी नज़र है  
खिले फूल-सी तेरी जवानी,  
कोई बताये, कहां कसर है!

Mukesh, who usually sang in a sober, sad voice, was singing with abandon. The words too were intoxicating, heady. I was about to start writing again when, after a momentary pause, Lata's soul-stirring call echoed, piercing the atmosphere, rending the heavens, tugging at the heart-strings...

आ आ जा मेरे मन चाहे बालम  
आ जा तेरा आंखों में घर है...

I stopped writing. The exclamation of a man craving a free, unfettered life on the one hand and the soulful anguish of a woman thwarted in love on the other:

: मैं चंचल मदमस्त पवन हूँ  
झूम झूम हर कली को चूमूं

- : बिछड़ गई मैं घायल हिरनी,  
तुमको दूँ, बन बन घूमूं  
: मेरी ज़िन्दगी मस्त सफ़र है,  
पतली कमर है, तिरछी नज़र है  
: तुम बिन नैनों की बरसातें  
रोक न पाऊं लाख मनाऊं  
: मैं बहते दरिया का पानी,  
खेल किनारों से बढ़ जाऊं, बंध न पाऊं  
: नया नगर नित नई डगर है,  
पतली कमर है, तिरछी नज़र है

This was the first song of Shailendra's I ever heard. This was our—his and mine—indirect introduction to each other. The charm of that song has never ebbed for me. (I had then felt that because the song had such spontaneity, the lyricist would have written the song first, and the music

*Shanker, Shailendra, Raj Khosla, and Mukesh at a 'sitting'. Courtesy: Raju Bharatan.*



director would then have composed music which could do justice to the contrary feelings expressed in the song. It was about 14 or 15 years later that I learnt from Shailendra that the music had already been composed when he was asked to write the song.) '*Barsat mein hum se mile tum*' and '*Patli kamar hai*' were the first two songs Shailendra wrote after entering the film world.

I saw Shailendra for the first time at Ahmedabad, some time during '57 or '58. A programme had been arranged at the Town Hall for Talat and Shailendra. Talat, with his melodious voice, enchanted everyone. Shailendra presented an innovative programme equally successfully. First, he narrated the situation against which one of his songs had been filmed, then recited the lyric in his inimitable style, and then played the tape-recording. All the songs were new then; they had neither been heard before, nor were they available in the market. The programme was loudly applauded. '*Sab kuchh sikha humne, na sikhi hoshiari*' and '*Kisiko kisipe bharosa nahin*'—he recited these songs from the films *Anadi* and *Ujala*. I must confess here that after having heard his songs and before having met Shailendra, I had imagined to myself what he would look like—and I must say that he turned out exactly as I had pictured him. (This kind of thing happens but rarely.) A darkish, lean youth with determined eyes and a very attractive smile. Later, whenever I saw him smiling, I remembered Renu's words: "गीतकार शैलेन्द्र जब मुस्कुराता है तो प्यार भरे गीत का कोई मुखड़ा गूँज उठता है!"

We met, Shailendra and I, for the first time in January '64, when I visited him at Rimjhim, his bungalow at Khar (*Barsat* had proved very successful, hence Rimjhim. His production concern then was *Image Makers*). To an outsider in Bombay like me he explained with affection and in great detail the intricacies of making a *kavi sammelan* successful\*. What a relief it was for me when he arrived punctually in his car at Ismail Yusuf College. He was to be the president of the *kavi sammelan*. He came in white shirt and trousers, wearing a sweater and *chappals*, carrying a tin of 555 cigarettes in his hand. (So many of his hit songs had been scribbled on cigarette packets when the inspiration came.) '*Dost dost no raha, pyar pyar na raha, zindagi hamein tera aitbar na raha*'—the students were mesmerized when he recited this lyric. *Sangam* was yet to be released.

I still remember an episode from that *sammelan*. Prof. Shankar Vaidya had published a review of an anthology of poems in *Alochana*, and therein had criticized poets who recited and wrote only for applause. While introducing Vaidya to Shailendra, I purposely repeated this comment. His

\* The author was visiting Shailendra to invite him for a *kavi sammelan*, a poets' meet, at his college—Tr.

reaction was: "Better we, the lyricists, who write for pre-composed music, than those so-called poets who sing their poems. Our songs at least afford pleasure when heard on records, whereas these so-called poets elicit some applause when they are heard—but later one realizes one has been taken for a ride."

Thereafter, in the next three years, we met often. We spoke freely, with candour. He was a good talker—soft-spoken, modest, sweet, confident and candid. Whenever I tried (purposely, of course) to irritate him, he quietly and patiently heard me out and then presented his argument boldly, backing it up with strong reason, nullifying my criticism. He was never evasive or devious or brusque. He knew he had a spark of genius in him and was justly proud of it. But there was no arrogance in him. And this in an industry where the prevailing belief among the leaders is that the sanity of the world collectively resides in them! Outsiders are just fools! This is perhaps the reason why the luminaries in the world of films talk incessantly. I was very keen to write on Shailendra and had repeatedly urged him to get all his lyrics together for me. It is a painstaking, time-consuming job to collect film-song books (which are usually full of mistakes) and rewrite the songs. But he always avoided this and till the end never did give me all his songs. When I would pester him, he would say: "Forget it yar! You professors have so many great poets to write about". He had slid from 'ap' to 'yar' so naturally. Once he told me why he got along so well with me. During one of our telephone conversations I had told him that in his lyric '*Ramayya vastavayya*' the lines

याद आती रही, दिल दुखाती रही  
अपने मन को मनाना न आया हमें  
तू न आए तो क्या, भूल जाए तो क्या  
प्यार करके भुलाना न आया हमें...

would come to my mind time and again. He had referred to this and told me later: "After you spoke to me I had the feeling that I could get along with you, for, you see, I myself have loved these lines dearly".

Shailendra's memory of how the tiny seed of this song took root in his mind is also very poetic. He was born in Rawalpindi on 30 August 1923. His father was a military man. Shailendra remembered the nights in Kohmuree, now in Pakistan, as a child. He would hear funny noises in the night, but he could never be certain whether they were made by animals or ghosts. He would be unable to sleep for fear and would never know when he had slipped into slumber. In the morning the front door would not open because of the snow. His father would sweep the snow away. In the winter, Shailendra would sit on the bed ensconced in a rug. His father, who had to



A Sangam song rehearsal, with Mukesh at the harmonium. Raj Kapoor and Shailendra are first and third from left, Jaikishan is seated. Courtesy: Raju Bharatan.

attend the morning parade, would go to his bath singing: This image of the child Krishna, impressed on his mind then, was never completely erased. And the song his mother would sing while grinding grain: '*Hans poochhe Janakpur ki nar...*' This was his first introduction to song, music, poetry. He could also remember the first night he directly participated in music and song. On the night of Basant Panchami, the followers of the Shivnarayan sect would sing during *arati*—'*Din daya-a-a-l kripa-a-a-l mahaprabho, din daya-a-a-l kripa-a-a-l mahaprabho...*'—and Shailendra would join them lustily. He would play the drum (Duff). He felt one must be born with an innate sense of rhythm, because there were people who could learn nothing about rhythm though they spent a lifetime trying to learn it.

Shailendra had to leave college for family reasons and take up an engineering apprenticeship. His pursuit of literature suffered. His Hindi professor lamented: "So now you will write poems on machines, eh?" Shailendra was not aware then that machines could also sing, but soon found out that one could sing along with machines. In place of the Tanpura, the drone could come from the hum of a machine. If one got the *sa* right, he would say, one could sing the cool songs of moonlight even on hot afternoons.

And so he spent seven or eight years in Bombay in the Railways, singing to the drone of machines. He was staying in the Railway colony at Parel. While working in the factory Shailendra watched life closely. He saw people from various corners of India, he found Indian unity amid social inequality. He worked for the trade unions. During this time the horrible poverty and social inequality he witnessed made a lasting impression on him. On pay-day there would be shops selling sweetmeats and clothes before the gates. And there would be Pathans and moneylenders to collect their interest from the workers. One had just to step out of the gates to be stopped by them. Poverty, like a leech, had stuck to the country and crores of people were indebted, eating their crust of bread with tears in their eyes. All this made him feel concerned. In a metropolitan city like Bombay the homeless, living on pavements, roaming aimlessly day and night, doing whatever work came their way, eating if they could, going hungry otherwise, committing petty thefts whenever the opportunity arose...he saw scores of such people. Together with this, he saw the rich lolling in the lap of luxury in high-rise buildings. He was revolted. His songs written during those days were sung before thousands of people in meetings and marches. They were published in *Naya Sahitya* and *Hansa*. There was anguish in those songs and there was vigour too.

But, as he always said, this period gave him an opportunity to study people at close quarters and understand their lives, their likes and dislikes—all of which paid rich dividends when he became a lyricist.

He felt it was better to be aware of oneself as a common human being rather than a poet. An artist does not fall from the heavens, he is just a human being—for, if he is not, how is he to know and understand the happiness and sorrows of mankind and how is he to voice them? Shailendra would say: "This I in Me (the human being in me) has sometimes thrown aside the poet's mantle and has forcibly brought the lyricist in me to my senses. The poet in me still carries the wounds inflicted by the nails of the human being in me. But the poet in me has ironed and kept ready the mercerized *dhoti* and the silk *kurta* for the right opportunity. (A pair of delicate spectacles is also lying unused, because the eyesight of the human in me is sharp yet!) But there has been no opportunity to use these—the paraphernalia of a poet—so far!"

Shailendra felt that artists who consider common men to be fools and their preferences base either haven't been able to recognize people for what they are, or haven't the capacity to write anything beautiful and good. Shailendra was not a poet to cater to the tastes of the chosen few. He was a people's poet. Hundreds of his songs were so written that they could be hummed by anybody—songs that pertained to man and man alone, the



feelings portrayed being the feelings of any human being. This was the secret of his success.

In those days Shailendra was a member of the cultural organization IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association). This was in 1946. Raj Kapoor was then working with Papaji (Prithviraj Kapoor) in Prithvi Theatres and had just started work on his first film. Once, while attending an IPTA function, he heard Shailendra sing a song on the stage: '*Mori bagiya mein ag laga gayo re gora pardesi...*' The feelings expressed in the song touched Raj Kapoor deeply. (Shailendra's sister, while playing in the streets of Kohmuree, was once hurt by a stone spitefully flung by some convent students. There was blood. Shailendra never forgot this first experience of the injustice of slavery. He expressed his bitterness towards foreign rule in a number of patriotic songs.) Raj Kapoor wanted a song portraying the horrible holocaust of partition for his film *Aag*. He went up to Shailendra and introduced himself: "I am Prithviraj Kapoor's son and am producing a film called *Aag*. Will you write songs for this film?"

"No!" Shailendra cut short this opening gambit with a single word.

Raj Kapoor of course had not expected this answer. He tried to talk of money, but there was no reaction from Shailendra. Later, in a short but tender article on Shailendra, Raj Kapoor wrote: "In those days the industry was dancing to the tune of *tum-tuma-tum-tum*\* and it was but natural that a creative poet like Shailendra should have no love for films". Shailendra had clearly told him: "I do not write for money and I see no other reason for writing for your film. So why should I write your songs?"

These words would do a film hero proud! But this is how it happened and Raj Kapoor was hurt. Both were young and of the same age. "All right, come to me when you feel like it. You are always welcome". So saying Raj Kapoor left, but the negative reply had made an impact. He was attracted towards this man.

*Aag* was produced without Shailendra's songs. Raj Kapoor started preparations for *Barsat*. And one day Shailendra suddenly appeared in his office. "Do you remember? You had once asked me to write songs for your film?" Shailendra's face carried the marks of hard times, worry, and a little anger.

Raj Kapoor said: "Yes, I remember."

Shailendra said: "Now I need money. I want 500 rupees. You can give me any work you like."

To speak obliquely or to be awed by others was not Shailendra's way, and

\* Onomatopoeic syllables from drum-beats connoting here a mad rush for quick gains without regard for scruples—Tr.

that is why Raj Kapoor felt that Shailendra was his true and honest friend. He was never overawed by Raj Kapoor when expressing his views or criticizing him.

Thus it was that Raj Kapoor brought Shailendra to the film industry and got him to write two songs for *Barsat*—the theme song, '*Barsat mein hamse mile tum*', and '*Patli kamar hai*'. *Barsat* proved to be a runaway success and the script-writer Ramanand Sagar, the actor Premnath, the actress Nimmi, Shanker-Jaikishan—the music duo—and Shailendra and Hasrat, the lyricists—all of them became famous overnight. From *Barsat* to *Mera Nam Joker*, Shailendra wrote the songs for all the films produced by Raj Kapoor. Every single time, Raj Kapoor got the theme song of his film written by Shailendra.

The artist in Raj Kapoor and the poet in Shailendra complemented one another. What Shailendra wanted to say, he could express through the films of Raj Kapoor. Both sincerely wanted their feelings to reach the common man. One was the people's artist, the other the people's poet. Their wishes and desires were one. Shailendra could touch the depths of Raj Kapoor's mind. Raj Kapoor always admitted that the success and fame he had won internationally were to a large extent due to '*Awara hun*', '*Mera juta hai Japani*', and other songs written by Shailendra. A distinct image of Raj Kapoor was forged by these songs.

Whatever Shailendra wrote came from his heart, his innermost being. If he was not pleased with what he wrote, he would change it again and again. But once a song had been written as he wanted it, nothing and nobody could make him change it. Not even Raj Kapoor. On one occasion Shanker thought that in the song '*Pyar hua ikrar hua*', the words '*dason dishayen*'—in the line '*Raten dason dishaon se kahengi apni kahaniyan*'—ought to be changed because the lay public would not grasp the meaning. There was a tremendous quarrel and Shailendra told him: "You are to compose the tune for the song. Writing the song is my job, and I know very well how to do it". Eventually, Raj Kapoor sided with Shailendra.

The song in *Aah*, '*Raja ki ayegi barat*', beautifully sung by Lata Mangeshkar, contains these lines: '*Main bhi apni man ki asha poori karungi zaroor, mehndi se peele honge hath, sahelion ke sath, magan main nachungi*'. Raj Kapoor asked Shailendra: " '*Mehndi se peele honge hath*'? Couldn't we change that a little?" "What I have written is absolutely correct": saying this in a determined voice, Shailendra sat quiet. Until he had absorbed the situation and awakened his emotions, Shailendra would not sit down to write, with the result that sometimes he would avoid writing for months together. Raj Kapoor would get annoyed with him because of this habit, but then he would say: "If Shailendra had been writing for the



love of money, he would have been the owner of a number of buildings in Bombay". Raj Kapoor was tired of prodding Shailendra to write the theme song for *Mera Nam Joker*. Eventually, when Shailendra did hand over the *mukhda* (opening stanza) of the song, Raj Kapoor was ecstatic:

जीना यहां मरना यहां, इसके सिवा जाना कहाँ  
जो चाहे जब हमको आवाज़ दो, हम हैं वहीं हम थे जहाँ  
अपने यहीं दोनों जहाँ, इसके सिवा जाना कहाँ.

Raj Kapoor and Khwaja Ahmed Abbas together could not put forth the truth about the Joker's fate that is expressed in these three lines. That becomes clear after seeing the film. Thus the greatness of Shailendra was underlined once again. But Shailendra left this world without writing anything further—the song remained unfinished. There was no second stanza. Later, Raj Kapoor tried to get it completed by many well known poets, but nothing would satisfy him. Once Shailendra's son Shelley Shailendra asked the irritated Raj Kapoor softly: "Shall I try, Uncle?"

"O.K., let's see", Raj Kapoor told him. And what a surprise! The second stanza written by Shelley was immensely liked by Raj Kapoor. In a burst of happiness he hugged the boy again and again. What he had wanted to convey through the song had been successfully expressed.

ये मेरा गीत, जीवन संगीत, कल भी कोई दोहराएगा  
जग को हंसाने बहुरूपिया रूप बदल फिर आएगा  
स्वर्ग यहीं नरक यहां, इसके सिवा जाना कहाँ.  
कल खेल में हम हो न हो गर्दिश में तारे रहेंगे सदा  
भूलोगे तुम, भूलेंगे वो, पर हम तुम्हारे रहेंगे सदा  
रहेंगे यहीं अपने निशां, इसके सिवा जाना कहाँ.

Shailendra wrote for great music directors like Shanker-Jaikishan, Sachin Dev Burman, Salil Chowdhury, and Anil Biswas—working for about 125 films in 17 or 18 years—and won immense popularity. He had a distinct viewpoint regarding songs, and it was because of this that he became successful. He bagged the first Filmfare award for lyricists for the song '*Ye mera diwanapan hai, ya muhabbat ka suroor*' in the film *Yahudi*.

What is a Hindi film song? *Pyar, muhabbat, balam, sanam, dil ke tukre*, etc. etc. strung together, and some rhyme patterns become slippery because of incessant use. These, according to the majority, constitute Hindi film songs. It is not too far wrong either, in most cases. There are a number of

limitations to the writing of a lyric for films, and yet something new, something that can tug at people's heart-strings, can be written in spite of the limitations. This has been clearly proved by Shailendra.

Just as drama is not merely to be read, but performed, so also film songs are for depiction on the silver screen. A film song, because it is to be heard and seen at the same time, is written keeping this in mind. We have all known that some very effective lines in a play on the stage seem lacklustre in print. So it is with films. A song which is good when seen in a film may not seem so good when read. Sometimes a song appears very ordinary. But then it has to cater to all and sundry, so a number of simple words from our daily life are used in it. Because the song is to be sung to a tune, the music-makers feel that it should not contain joint consonants. Not 'सवत्र' but 'सपना', not 'मित्र' but मीत or मितवा. Again, sometimes the singers find the language difficult if there are Sanskritic words, so the lyricist has to guard against that too. He has to write something which will fit in precomposed music. And most important of all, it is not the feelings of the poet the song would depict, but those of the character on the screen in a given situation. The freedom to say what he feels is denied to a film lyricist. To overcome these myriad limitations and yet maintain one's style is indeed not an easy job.

A film song is a specialized art—that was Shailendra's contention. Almost all our films contain songs, which sometimes serve as dialogue. Shailendra never forgot this. He was aware that were it not so, a song would seem to be forcibly pushed into the story, holding up the stream of narration. He did not agree with the view that a song written for a tune already composed could not be a good song. He questioned this argument. Did not poets in our country in the distant past write in certain metres? Was it not the same thing? A metre has a particular tune. If a poet had a good ear and understanding of music he could easily write a song to a given tune—a song which could be called good. The poet also found in this way new metres to experiment with, he would say. In the same way, he believed, a music director should have a knowledge of poetry. If he possessed this, he could compose music to enhance the feelings of a poet already expressed in a given song. Some of Shailendra's songs, excellent in their poetic content, have been written to precomposed music. Music director Shanker has not forgotten the night when, in the dim light of the room, while he was strumming the strings of the Sitar, coaxing out a melody, Shailendra, sitting right before him, had penned these words expressing sorrow and pain, evoked by the sad music:

रोऊँ मैं सागर के किनारे सागर हंसी उड़ाए  
क्या जाने यह चंचल लहरें, मैं हूँ आग छुपाए...

Singing this song in his deep and grave voice, playback singer C.H. Atma became famous overnight.

Shailendra's lyrics were simple, natural and plain. He chose his words with care. He never forgot that his songs were meant to be filmed. Whenever he read out his poems to me, I could not only hear them, I could also see them. For example, in the film *Jis Desh mein Ganga Behti Hai*, the song '*Mera nam Raju gharana anam*' contained all the visuals that were seen on the screen: Raju rowing the boat, the funeral pyres on the *ghats* of Banaras, etc. His songs had a sweep, a flow. He was very careful to avoid fragmentation, contrariness (or else the *gori* in the opening stanza would suddenly become *sanvli* in the next). Easy, simple language expressing intense emotions—this was his *forte*. His writing did not mirror falsehood at all. There was a reason for this. He had picked everything up from the life around him. Once, after a quarrel with Shanker-Jaikishan, he had exclaimed: '*Chhoti si yeh duniya pahchane raste hain, kabhi to milenge, to puchhenge hal...*'

This proved to be a hit song for Kishore Kumar in the film *Rangoli*. One day, while walking along with Shailendra on a road, music director Shanker was constantly turning around to look at a girl. Shailendra told him: '*Mud mud ke na dekh... tu akela hi nahin hai, hum bhi tere humsafar hain...*' These words, with a little twist, became the opening stanza of a popular song of *Shri* 420:

मुड़ मुड़ के न देख  
मुड़ मुड़ के  
ज़िन्दगानी के सफ़र में  
तू अकेला ही नहीं है  
हम भी तेरे हमसफ़र हैं...

Writing romantic songs is the *forte* of some lyricists, they are unable to write anything else. Shailendra was at ease in all varieties of songs. He wrote songs about trysts and yearnings with appropriate delicate nuances, songs of patriotic fervour and social uplift, those with the family as background—with its sorrows and joys—devotional Bhajans, and even children's songs. He could wax eloquent and philosophical—and all in songs, in easy-flowing words which touched all hearts. To put it in his words: '*Dil ka hal sune dilwala, sidhi si bat na mirch masala...*'

There never was any vulgarity in Shailendra's romantic songs, he never lost his balance. '*Ruk ja o janewali ruk ja*'—this naughty call was followed by '*Nazron mein teri main bura sahi, admi bura nahin main dil ka*'.

Even in a song like '*Mere man ki Ganga, aur tere man ki Jamuna ka, bol*

*Radha bol Sangam hoga ki nahin'*—a song teasing the heroine of *Sangam*, he did not fail to evoke the spiritual meaning connected with the Radha of yore, abiding in the Indian psyche:

कितनी सदियाँ बीत गई हैं, हाय तुझे समझाने में  
मेरे जैसा धीरज वाला, है कोई और ज़माने में?

Sometimes he penned dream-like emotions of love—

जाने कैसे सपनों में खो गई अंखियाँ,  
मैं तो हूँ जागे मेरी सो गई अंखियाँ.  
—and sometimes the thwarted heart's soulful lament:  
याद आती रही, दिल दुखाती रही  
अपने मन को मनाना न आया हमें  
तू न आए तो क्या, भूल जाए तो क्या  
प्यार करके भुलाना न आया हमें...

He felt that patriotism, or love of one's country, were not emotions which could be worn like costumes, to be discarded at will. These feelings were embedded in his heart, his blood. That is why he could write:

मेरा जूता है जापानी  
यह पतलून इंग्लिस्तानी  
सर पे लाल टोपी रूसी  
फिर भी दिल है हिन्दुस्तानी

In these lines what he wanted to emphasize was that we have not mortgaged our hearts to foreigners. '*Hum us desh ke basi hain, Jis desh mein Ganga behti hai*'—in this song he compared the West to the East and pinpointed the negative qualities of the former:

कुछ लोग ज्यादा जानते हैं  
इन्सान को हम पहचानते हैं  
यह पूरब है, पूरब वाले  
हर जान की कीमत जानते हैं

In the West one witnesses the progress of science, of knowledge, but in this mindless race, humanism is somehow discarded on the way, the life of a human being becomes worthless. In a few simple words Shailendra describes this. And in '*Ab kahan jayen hum*' he competently lays bare the

fear and distrust of the present generation:

अब कहाँ जाएँ हम ये बता ए ज़मीं  
 इस जहाँ में तो कोई हमारा नहीं  
 अपने साये से भी लोग डरने लगे  
 अब किसी को किसी पे भरोसा नहीं.  
 नफ़रत है निगाहों में  
 ये कैसा ज़हर फैला दुनिया की हवाओं में  
 प्यार की बस्तियाँ खाक होने लगीं  
 अब किसी को किसी पे भरोसा नहीं.

From the lips of homeless wanderers:

ऊपर नीचे, नीचे ऊपर, लहर चले जीवन की  
 नादाँ है जो बैठ किनारे पूछे रह वतन की  
 चलना जीवन की कहानी, रुकना मौत की निशानी

In talking about his life's philosophy thus, he was aware of the shackles which bind humans, and that is why, in '*Tu pyar ka sagar hai*', he wrote: '*Idhar ghoom ke jaye zindagi, udhar hai maut khadi*'.

In '*Bol re kathputli*' he comes forth with '*Kathputli ka khel hai duniya, sajan hai us par*', and in '*Andhe jahan ke andhe raste, jayen to jayen kahan*', he talks about the sorrow of human helplessness: '*Is par ansu, us par ahen, hum yahan na vahan*'.

In his '*Awara hun*', the awara poses a question to the world at large: Who is responsible for my sorrowful condition—fate or social inequality?

आबाद नहीं, बरबाद सही,  
 गाता हूँ खुशी के गीत मगर  
 ज़ख्मों से भरा सीना है मेरा  
 हंसती है मगर यह मस्त नज़र  
 दुनिया, दुनिया, मैं तेरे तोर का या तकदीर का मारा हूँ

I still remember Shailendra once told me in confidence: "What am I to do, I am a victim of social inequality, but basically I am a poet of love, nature and music, I have an unassailable fascination for them"—

मुझको ये नरक न चाहिए  
 मुझको फूल, मुझको गीत,  
 मुझको प्रीत चाहिए,  
 मुझको चाहिए बहार...

Because of this, one could easily discern the influence of folk songs in the various dialects of Hindi on Shailendra's film songs.

'*Dayya re dayya...*'—this song from *Madhumati* became immensely popular. And from *Teesri Kasam*: 'sajanwa bairi ho gaye hamar...' Mukesh's song touched the listeners' hearts, while Asha's soulful voice, echoing the anguish of a married woman thinking of her parents' home, brought tears to one's eyes:

अब के बरस भेज भैया को बाबुल  
सावन में लीजो बुलाए रे  
लौटेंगी जब मेरे बचपन की सखियां  
दीजो संदेसा भिजाय रे  
अंबुवा तले फिर से झूले पड़ेगे  
रिमझिम पड़ेगी फुहारें  
लौटेंगी फिर से तेरे आंगन में बाबुल  
सावन की ठंडी बयारें  
छलके नयन मोरा तरस रे जियरा  
बचपन की जब याद आए रे

Shailendra was extremely proud of Indian culture and that is why a number of mythological allusions are found in his songs—some overt, some subtle. Thus it is not surprising that a situational song like '*Pativrata Sita ko tune diya banvas*' from *Awara* was found to be very apt. At the same time '*O basanti pavan pagal*', which made a pertinent reference to Ahalya, also made an equal impact:

बन के पत्थर हम पड़े थे सूनी सूनी रह में  
जी उठे हम जब से तेरी बांह आई बांह में

How Shailendra, who was happy to write for precomposed music, could come up with apt and fitting words is truly a matter for wonder—he could build up an atmosphere which left the listener in a bewitched mood:

भूली बिसरी यादें मेरे हंसते-गाते बचपन की  
रात-बिरात चली आती हैं नौद चुराने नैनन की  
अब कह दूंगी करते-करते कितने सावन बीत गये  
जाने कब इन आंखों का शरमाना जाएगा

or

लौट आई सदा मेरी टकराके सितारों से  
उजड़ी हुई दुनिया के सुनसान किनारों से



When one hears in such songs evocative words like *bhuli-bisri*, *hanste-gate*, *rat-birat*, *ujdi hui*, *sunsan*, one can make out that the principle of rhythm in Shailendra's songs worked according to Mardhekar's critical theory. So I have felt many a time.

Really speaking, Shailendra had absorbed the rhythm of the Hindi language to such an extent that he could write effortlessly and effectively. Most of us are unable to find the rhythm of our respective mother tongues and our output suffers because of this reason. Shailendra not only wrote in Hindi, he could also write in chaste Urdu. A film song should have language appropriate to the situation. He never forgot this dictum

दुआ कर गये दिल, खुदा से दुआ कर  
वफ़ाओं से मजबूर दामन बिछाकर  
जो बिजली चमकती है उनके महल पर  
वो कर ले तसल्ली मेरा घर जला कर

This sad song in Urdu from *Anarkali* written by Shailendra was brought to my notice by Sahir Ludhianvi when he was eulogizing Shailendra.

Just as it is meaningless to say that Lata Mangeshkar's contribution in the field of classical music is nil, it is equally pointless to stress Shailendra's non-performance as a literary poet. To compare Lata Mangeshkar with Kumar Gandharva, Bhimsen Joshi, etc. is meaningless; so also a comparison between Shailendra and Hindi literary poets is merely an exercise in futility. The importance of Lata and Shailendra lies in the fact that they did not hoard the wealth of their voice and songs for a handful of people, but generously distributed it to the larger public open-handedly. Lata's voice and Shailendra's words not only echoed in every nook and corner of India, but also crossed the boundaries of the land. They plucked at the heart-strings of millions who do not understand or enjoy classical music or literary poetry, and brought solace and happiness to sorrowing and harried souls. This is truly a unique example of service to humanity. Where Shailendra's words and Lata's voice come together this kind of everlasting song is born:

आजा रे परदेसी  
मैं कब से खड़ी इस पार  
यह अखियां थक गईं पथ निहार

What place is accorded to the film lyricist in the history of literature? I had once teased Shailendra with this question, for I had heard that even a

poet of the stature of G.D. Madgulkar, who wrote for Marathi films, was looked down upon. According to the new poets, Madgulkar was no poet—he was a lyricist. When I said this, Shailendra immediately came back with: “I am proud that I am a lyricist”. That every lyricist takes great pains to write a song is of course not true, it is equally untrue that each poet is divinely inspired to write a poem. “I write a song for my own pleasure, and the song ‘Mera nam Raju’ does reflect my emotions”, Shailendra had once said.

काम नये नित गीत बनाना  
गीत बनाके जहां को सुनाना  
कोई न मिले तो अकेले में गाना

He was aware of the fact, but was not sorry, that had he written poems, he would have had a place in literature. Quite a few lyricists have an inferiority complex about this, but not Shailendra. One thing he did impress upon me: whatever he might have said in poems written for himself he had publicly said in his film songs. What would have reached people through poems, he would emphasize, reached more people through his songs: “I started to write film songs for some reasons, but having accepted the medium once, I remained completely faithful to it. To go into one room and write film songs, then retreat into another and write ten pages of blank verse to wash out the sin—this kind of a double role brings nothing but failure in both”. Shailendra was of the opinion that an artist should first choose his medium of expression and then, without regret or worry about others’ opinions, should try to attain excellence in it. It did no good to crib that somebody was being paid 5000 rupees for a mere song, while you got a paltry five rupees for a good poem. What happened to those successful Urdu poets who entered films after having attained fame in literature? They did not contribute much to literature later.

Is it possible to write good poetry both in films and in literature at the same time? To this question, Sahir Ludhianvi had replied carefully—It is possible only if one wrote for only a couple of films a year. But that is not possible, it cannot be possible in a highly competitive sphere like films. This truth Shailendra had accepted, and had used the medium of song-writing to pour out all that he felt as a poet.

To use his own words: “My name may or may not appear in literary history, but my songs appeal equally to a professor of poetics like you and a man of the street, an *awara*. That they like it, want to hum it—is my literary success. And if perchance someday a film song is considered a special category of poetry and its history is written, will not my name appear in it?”

कविगज कहे न यह ताज रहे  
 न यह राज रहे  
 न यह राज घराना  
 प्रीत और प्रीत का गीत रहे  
 कभी लूट सका  
 न कोई यह खजाना

A story titled *Teesri Kasam* by one of the eminent fiction writers of Hindi, Phanishwar Nath Renu, was brought to the silver screen by Shailendra, and it got him the President's Gold Medal. And yet this film proved to be the tragedy of Shailendra's life. This story of Renu's was truly an emotional song, which the song-writer could not but bring to the screen. *Teesri Kasam* was Shailendra's dream, waiting to be realized. When I first met Shailendra, preparations were on to start the film. I can still visualize the excitement on Shailendra's face as he talked about it. At his insistence I had witnessed the shooting at the Andheri Studios in January of 1965. He had whispered: "Do not ask any awkward questions to Raj Kapoor. I want to get the best from him and he is very moody, so please be careful". "Translate *Teesri Kasam* in Marathi, I will help you", he had also said. But this was not to be. While watching the shooting of this film I had grave doubts about how this delicate story would do in the market which was used



'Dost dost na raha':  
 a Sangam disc.  
 Courtesy: Society of Indian  
 Record Collectors.

to cheap but successful Hindi films. Besides, Shailendra was adamant about remaining true to the spirit of the original story.

Friends like Raj Kapoor had warned him earlier: "Do not fall into the trap of making films—it is not for a sensitive and emotional poet like you. It's not your cup of tea at all".

But when he paid no heed and started work, Raj Kapoor advised him to make some changes in the story which would make the film commercially viable. But Shailendra had replied: "It is my film and it will be made as I want it made".

सब कुछ सीखा हमने  
न सीखी होशियारी  
सच है दुनियावालों  
हम हैं अनाड़ी

Raj Kapoor had enacted out this song of Shailendra's on the screen for *Anadi*, but in real life it was Shailendra who proved to be the *anadi*. Heeding no advice, he proceeded on the path of self-destruction.

दुनिया ने कितना समझाया  
कौन है अपना कौन पराया  
फिर भी दिल की चोट छुपाकर  
हमने आपका दिल बहलाया  
खुद ही मर मिटने की  
यह ज़िद है हमारी  
सच है दुनियावालों,  
हम हैं अनाड़ी...

Shailendra finished the film the way he wanted. He trusted human beings and so had paid no heed to the pot-holes on the roads of the film industry. He got ensnared in the commercial network, the picture failed, and he lost everything. He was heavily in debt.

But is this the whole story behind Shailendra's untimely death? In this industry almost everyone drinks, everyone is in debt—which is paid back if one tries hard enough. The sensitive and tender Shailendra had already recognized the footsteps of death. I was stunned to read in the papers, on the 15th of December 1966, that Shailendra was no more. The 14th of December was Raj Kapoor's birthday and it was on that day that Shailendra had breathed his last.

I could recall the Shailendra who had suddenly landed up in my room at

Hotel Majestic, opposite Regal, to console me on the death of my one-and-a-half-year-old son. I had sent Vibhavari to her parents and was lying in bed in the growing darkness. He opened the door and entered. "Are yar, why are you sitting in the dark? Put on the lights..." saying something to this effect, he switched on the lights and dispelled the gloom. Pulling me up by the shoulders, he took me to the breezy, open beach, offering me tea, trying to make me feel better. Shailendra, who had consoled me by saying that death's sorrow had to be borne with patience and grappled with courageously, had himself so suddenly submitted to death. '*Humsafar ek din to bichhadna hi tha*'—these words of his may be true, but did he have to hasten away so soon?

Shortly before, I had met him at a programme, but there had been no frankness between us. I was a little perturbed about this. And now, after reading the news of his death, I became depressed. I remembered the songs he had recently written on death. Why had he written so much on death? '*Zindagi hamein tera aitbar na raha*'—why did he have such a distrust of life? Having heard the tread of death, why did he not confide in anyone about the hurt he had suffered?

सब ने अपनी कह ली लेकिन हम चुपचाप रहे  
दर्द पराया जिसको प्यारा वह क्या अपनी बात कहे  
खामोशी का यह अफ़साना रह जाएगा बाद मेरे  
अपनाके हर किसीको बेगाना जाएगा...

Everyone had opened out their hearts to him, but he had remained silent. One who had taken as his own the sorrows of others, what could he say for himself? What would remain after him was the story of his silence. He took with him the pain of being uncared for, while caring for a lot of people himself.

सजन रे झूठ मत बोलो, खुदा के पास जाना है  
न हाथी है न घोड़ा है, वहां पैदल ही जाना है

Saying this, he prepared for his last journey. He had wanted to say what he had not been able to say before, but it was not to be.

कभी जो कह न पाए बात वह होठों  
पे जब आई  
अदालत उठ चुकी हो तो करेगा  
कौन सुनवाई?

हम तो जाते अपने गाम  
अपनी राम राम राम  
सबको राम राम राम...

All he could utter before leaving was to beg forgiveness for any mistake he might have committed. Why take a madman seriously?

हुई हो भूल कोई तो उसे दिल से भुला देना  
कोई दीवाना था उसकी बात पे ध्यान क्या देना

Knowing well that life is but a dream, he had loved it excessively. Happiness and sorrow... like everyone else he had had a share of these too. His pain was crying out to be uttered... but to whom? Speaking about it made no sense. He embraced his sorrow and carried on, for he was not ready to admit defeat and sit by the wayside. His earthly sojourn was only for a brief while—his haven was there, on the opposite bank. It was inevitable that he should leave his fellow travellers:

ज़िन्दगी ख़ाब है, था हमें भी पता  
पर हमें ज़िन्दगी से बहुत प्यार था  
सुख भी थे, दुख भी थे दिल को घेरे हुए  
चाहे जैसा था, रंगीन संसार था...  
आ गई थी शिकायत लबों तक मगर  
किसे कहते तो क्या कहना बेकार था...  
चल पड़े दर्द पीकर तो चलते रहे  
हार कर बैठ जाने से इनकार था  
चंद दिन था बसेरा हमारा यहां  
हम भी मेहमान थे, घर तो उस पार था  
हमसफ़र, एक दिन तो बिछड़ना ही था  
अलविदा, अलविदा, अलविदा, अलविदा...

(Translated from the Marathi by Hemangini A. Ranade. The original essay—'Hamsafar, Ek Din Bichhadna hi tha...'—belongs to the book Geet Yatri.)